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# State, local budget cuts slash adult education

Chip Johnson

Tuesday, June 30, 2009

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California is about to reach another benchmark by offering fewer adult education opportunities to its residents than - well, just about any other state.

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When classes resume in the fall, most of the state's 2 million adult education students will pay registration fees for all classes - including high school equivalency and English as a Second Language classes, two classes that have traditionally been free.

"Almost all adult schools across the state are going to be charging something," said Jerry Green, director of Castro Valley Adult School. "We will be charging a

modest fee for all classes except for high school dropouts under 18."

Green, who represents Alameda and Contra Costa counties in the statewide Association of California School Administrators, said most schools will charge between \$20 to \$35 for high school GED and English classes.

The new fees are the result of a 20 percent cut in state funding over the past two statewide budget cycles, including this year's \$24.3 billion shortfall. A change in the state education code this year also gave local school boards funding discretion over adult programs. Finally, state officials cut average daily attendance funding for adult schools.

It's a pretty sad state of affairs to watch state officials anchored with a \$25 billion deficit do all it can to lay the pain on the doors of those with the least resources to fight back: the frail, the addled, the elderly, the disenfranchised and the children.

"The programs we've had to cut because of necessity have left the most vulnerable and voiceless people in our society unattended," said Marcie Plummer, an assistant principal at Hayward Adult School.

While I understand the economic need that requires such drastic cuts in state public education funding, I fear the short-term solution comes with long-term risk to the greater society.

Cutting cost-effective education programs at a time when American workers are re-inventing themselves and new arrivals in this state are trying to familiarize

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themselves with language and culture seems unwise and short-sighted.

And wherever you go in California, the story is the same.

In Hayward, where school board officials took \$3 million from adult education for public schools next year, it meant the end of a well-attended program, said Ana Solomon, principal of Hayward Adult School.

As a result, the school will no longer offer a popular ukulele class and, more important, will cut the physical fitness, memory and social classes that keep students fit and active, Solomon said. The school has also had to lay off more than 100 teachers, and classes for developmentally disabled students have also been cut.

"For some of our students, these classes are the reason they get out of the bed in the morning, it gives them somewhere to go and a place to meet with people and be social," Solomon said.

Adult education officials in Oakland are scrambling to find affordable classroom space in Chinatown for about 100 ESL students, said Chris Nelson, assistant director of the program.

The state funding cuts combined with a recommendation from the Oakland School Board to take \$1 million from the adult school means the school district's adult program will be cut by half, he said.

In the East Bay, virtually all of the adult school programs, from San Leandro to Berkeley to West Contra Costa County, will be making significant reductions in their class schedules as well as implementing fees, said Green, who is also part of a network of adult educators in Alameda County.

In Castro Valley, where 4,800 students attended classes last year, most are part-timers who take a computer class or a class to learn a specific skill set, Green said.

"The loss of classes like these means there is a large portion of our population that will go underserved and suffer from a lack of job skills, socialization skills and the ability to understand the language," he said. To accommodate the funding loss, the Castro Valley program has reduced memory and fitness programs at eight local senior centers and has reduced program offerings for developmentally disabled residents, Green said.

"This is a population that flies underneath the radar in our society," Green. "How will their needs be taken care of?"

*Chip Johnson's column appears in the Chronicle on Tuesdays and Fridays. E-mail him at [chjohnson@sfgchronicle.com](mailto:chjohnson@sfgchronicle.com).*

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